



# The Human Services Workforce Initiative

## *Capturing Promising Practices*



Prepared by  
the National Collaborative for Youth

Copyright ©2006 Cornerstones For Kids  
One Greenway Plaza, Suite 550, Houston, Texas 77046  
Ph 713.627.2322 • Fax 713.627.3006 • Email [info@cornerstones4kids.org](mailto:info@cornerstones4kids.org)

# **Capturing Promising Practices**

**2006**

**A Report prepared for the Human Services Workforce Initiative by  
National Youth Development Learning Network  
National Human Services Assembly/National Collaboration for Youth**

## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Cornerstones for Kids Introduction</b>                                | 3  |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>  | 4  |
| <b>Introduction</b>  | 5  |
| <b>Identifying Promising Practices</b>                                   | 7  |
| <b>Retention Begins with Recruitment and Is Ongoing</b>                  | 8  |
| <b>Recruitment</b>   | 9  |
| <i>Provide Incentives</i>  | 9  |
| <i>Capitalize on Technology</i>  | 10 |
| <i>Create Specific Strategies for College-Age Workers</i>                | 11 |
| <i>Reach Out for Diversity</i>   | 12 |
| <i>Prepare Youth to be Youth Workers</i>                                 | 14 |
| <b>Retention</b>   | 16 |
| <i>Select Staff Carefully</i>  | 16 |
| <i>Provide Adequate Compensation</i>                                     | 17 |
| <i>Offer Opportunities for Advancement</i>                               | 19 |
| <i>Create Supportive Environments &amp; Climates that Foster Success</i> | 21 |
| <i>Insist on Professional Development &amp; Training</i>                 | 22 |
| <i>Value &amp; Respect Youth Workers</i>                                 | 26 |
| <i>Ensure Opportunities for Networking</i>                               | 27 |
| <b>Recommendations for Improving Recruitment &amp; Retention</b>         | 30 |
| <b>Conclusion</b>  | 32 |
| <b>Appendix A: The National Collaboration for Youth</b>                  | 33 |
| <b>Appendix B: Interviewees</b>  | 34 |
| <b>Appendix C: Advisory Group</b>  | 35 |
| <b>Appendix D: Organization Descriptions</b>                             | 36 |
| <b>Appendix E: Methodology</b>   | 40 |
| <b>References</b>  | 42 |

## Cornerstones for Kids Introduction

The Human Services Workforce Initiative (HSWI) is focused on the frontline workers serving vulnerable children and families. HSWI's premise is that human services matter. Delivered well, they can, and do, positively impact the lives of vulnerable children and families, often at critical points in their lives.

We believe that the quality of the frontline worker influences the effectiveness of services they deliver to children and families. If workers are well-trained and supported, have access to the resources that they need, possess a reasonable workload, and are valued by their employers, it follows that they will be able to effectively perform their jobs. If, however, they are as vulnerable as the children and families that they serve, they will be ineffective in improving outcomes for children and families.

Unfortunately, all indications today are that our frontline human services workforce is struggling. In some instances poor compensation contributes to excessive turnover; in others an unreasonable workload and endless paperwork render otherwise capable staff ineffective; and keeping morale up is difficult in the human services fields. It is remarkable that so many human services professionals stick to it, year after year.

HSWI's mission is to work with others to raise the visibility of, and sense of urgency about, workforce issues. Through a series of publications and other communications efforts we hope to

- Call greater attention to workforce issues
- Help to describe and define the status of the human services workforce
- Disseminate data on current conditions
- Highlight best and promising practices
- Suggest systemic and policy actions that can make a deep, long-term difference

In this paper the National Collaboration for Youth reports on the findings of its investigation into best practices in the recruitment and retention of youth workers. Based on surveys, interviews, and a symposium with representatives of NCY member organizations and on the input of an advisory group of experts, the report describes a variety of practical and effective strategies currently in use by a number of local organizations that serve youth. While this is not a comprehensive listing, it provides useful recommendations for any local organization attempting to respond to the challenges of effectively recruiting and retaining qualified and competent youth workers.

Additional information on the human services workforce, and on HSWI, is available at [www.cornerstones4kids.org](http://www.cornerstones4kids.org).

Cornerstones For Kids  
2006

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation to the many people who have contributed to *Capturing Promising Practices in Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Youth Workers*. Special thanks to the National Collaboration for Youth/National Human Services Assembly for over 30 years of commitment to the task of promoting youth issues intentionally.

This publication would not have been possible without Sharon Edwards and the generous funding provided by Cornerstones for Kids. I thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this publication are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Cornerstones for Kids.

Many people volunteered their time to *Capturing Promising Practices in Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Youth Workers*. My special thanks to

- Those who completed the survey, graciously participated in the interviews, and made themselves available to attend the symposium. The programs they represent were chosen because of their forward-thinking efforts in advancing the youth work profession (Appendix B).
- The Advisory Group who, in spite of their busy schedules, provided guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the final development of this publication (Appendix C).

I am grateful as well to the talented team of consultants and staff who focused their time and expertise to ensure the high quality of this publication:

- The research team at the University of Nevada, Reno: Joyce (Letner) Hartje, who, with assistance from Bill Evans, conducted the research, summarized the findings, and was the primary author of this publication
- Terry Quinn, for his final editing
- Shawn Newton, for her creative design work
- Stephanie Artman, Project Assistant, for reviewing the publication.

Pam Garza

Director

*National Youth Development Learning Network*

*National Human Services Assembly/National Collaboration for Youth*

## Introduction

***A nation that truly wants no child left behind must make sure that workers who care for children, youth, and families have the motivation, resources, and support to succeed.<sup>1</sup>***

The staff who work directly with youth in community-based organizations represent an essential component in creating program environments that facilitate positive development. A common challenge faced by youth service organizations, however, is how to attract and retain qualified individuals. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) emphasizes the critical link between youth outcomes and positive relationships between young people and skilled staff.<sup>2</sup> A continual influx of inexperienced and inadequately trained workers threatens the development of such relationships as well as the implementation of effective youth programs, thus presenting significant challenges to achieving positive youth outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's March 2003 report, *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform: The Condition of the Frontline Human Services Workforce*, documented many conditions that are at odds with developing and retaining a healthy, productive human services workforce: heavy workloads, long hours, and high vulnerability to burnout; high turnover among the most talented employees; significant minorities reporting that they do not have access to essential resources; low pay and few rewards for talent and achievement; and staff members' dissatisfaction with the low level of respect received for their work.<sup>4</sup> Working with youth is rewarding; however, it is also emotionally and physically challenging. Without adequate support, supervision, resources and training, staff turnover is likely to be high and to necessitate a continual rebuilding of a youth organization's direct service segment.<sup>5</sup>

Given the ongoing interest in providing high-quality programming for youth among those concerned about children and families, a better understanding of how to find, develop, and retain skilled program staff becomes a high priority for

youth-serving organizations. To address these issues, the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) received funding from Cornerstones for Kids to research and disseminate promising recruitment and retention strategies being used by NCY member organizations. Interviews were conducted with 20 leaders in the youth service field at the local and national levels, most in community-based organizations. These local agencies employ roughly 16,000 frontline youth workers, at annual salaries ranging from \$14,500 to \$31,500, and provide program services to more than 200,000 youth. While the results of these interviews do not represent a comprehensive study of all youth service groups or even all NCY organizations, they do illustrate a wide range of effective strategies. In addition, an advisory group provided insight and perspective. (Appendix E, page 39, contains a complete description of the methodology.) *Capturing Promising Practices in Recruitment and Retention of Youth Workers* describes how select organizations have already put into effect practical and concrete activities for dealing with key issues relating to frontline youth workers and provides recommendations for other local organizations facing similar issues of recruitment and retention.

## Identifying Promising Practices

In the literature on youth work and organizational psychology several themes emerge as essential to promoting worker success: (1) adequate compensation and opportunities for advancement; (2) opportunities for professional development and training; (3) a supportive environment that fosters success (this includes adequate supervision and a climate of collaboration); (4) clear role descriptions and competence to perform those roles; (5) a sense that staff members' work is valued; and (6) opportunities for networking.<sup>6</sup> While each of these features individually plays a substantial role in how individuals perceive their work environments, it is difficult to separate them completely in practice. For example, individuals need to be adequately compensated and have a clear understanding of their role within the context of the organizational mission in order to be motivated to pursue professional development opportunities. In addition, staff need to have a sense that their work has meaning and that they are supported and valued by supervisors and co-workers. With these elements in place, youth service organizations will also be in a position to promote a more professional image of youth work.<sup>7</sup>

This publication presents numerous strategies focused on either recruitment or retention. It is important to note, however, that many of these approaches could affect both areas.

Strategies aimed at staff recruitment are presented first. We provide promising practices for offering incentives, using the Internet as a recruitment tool, and recruiting youth workers from diverse populations. Staff retention strategies are presented next and include promising practices that encompass compensation, career advancement, professional development, respecting and valuing workers, creating a supportive and inclusive environment, and establishing peer networks. We conclude with recommendations for both local and national organizations.

## **Retention Begins with Recruitment and Is Ongoing**

**I once worked with a young man at a local agency who was from the community and who had a natural ability to be an effective youth worker. He could understand and speak honestly to the young people, had the skills he needed to really make a difference, loved what he did and where he worked—just the type of person we want to recruit and retain. But we lost “Joe.” Joe had a dilemma: he had to support his family, and so he took another job. You can now find him working as the doorman at a major hotel downtown. This is a loss that our young people cannot afford.**

Mo Barbosa, The Medical Foundation,  
Massachusetts

Good recruitment strategies often prove to be a critical first step in the successful retention of competent youth workers. The maintenance of a stable workforce can only come about when organizations recruit the right people for the right reasons and then compensate, train, and support them so that they are motivated to stay. For instance, the decision to work with youth is not necessarily based on individuals' beliefs that they are or want to be experts in the field. For some, it is a desire to pay back what someone did for them, to follow in the footsteps of a role model, or simply to make a difference in their community.<sup>8</sup> For others, it is “the joy of being with young people, learning from them, contributing to their success and having the opportunity to advocate for young people and help them be heard.”<sup>9</sup> For many it may be a first job that brings in needed income for rent or college tuition. Regardless of the motivation, a sense of “doing good” will not be enough to keep individuals in the youth work field without the prospect of making a living wage or having benefits that help ensure a secure future. Likewise, unless youth service agencies make an intentional effort to bring qualified individuals into the field, efforts aimed at attaining positive outcomes for our nation's youth will be compromised.

## ***Recruitment***

Hiring individuals who are committed and passionate about working with young people is vital to positive outcomes for the futures of youth, families, communities, and the nation.<sup>10</sup> By being deliberate, creating strategies for recruitment, and putting time, money, and energy into securing the right candidates, organizations are finding they can recruit and often retain staff more effectively and achieve the diversity and quality they need. What follows are a few examples of what local organizations are doing to recruit frontline youth workers and avoid constant staff turnover.

### ***Provide Incentives***

***Too often organizations have the mindset that these positions turn over quickly, and therefore they don't invest in developing a process to attract great people.***

Russ Finkelstein, Action Without Borders/Idealist.org

Studies show that a perception of compatibility among the individual staff member, co-workers, and the work environment positively affects work-related behaviors and outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Consistent with this research, youth service organizations report that some of their most effective employees are those who were recruited by staff members. As a result, many agencies provide incentives to encourage existing staff to recruit new workers. In addition, organizations are finding that offering current workers an incentive to return during the next season is an effective recruitment and retention strategy.

***Offer a Finder's Fee:*** Camp Fire USA Alaska Council pays part-time workers a fee for referring individuals to the agency (\$100 at hiring date and \$50 after six months of employment). Not only does the agency receive help in recruiting good staff, but the work environment potentially becomes cohesive more quickly

because new staff are already familiar with the individuals with whom they are working.

**Promote Peer Recruitment:** Westside YMCA believes that qualified and competent staff members tend to have friends whose background and work ethic are similar to their own. In an effort to hire “like-minded” staff, the organization offers a \$50 incentive to current staff members who refer job candidates. When such individuals are hired and again once they have worked for 90 days, the referring staff members receive an additional \$25 referral incentive.

**Offer a Return Incentive:** Since many of Westside YMCA’s camp, aquatics, and after-school programs are seasonal, the agency’s hiring efforts often focus on college students who might be looking for jobs during their breaks from school. At the end of each program cycle, staff members are offered a \$25 incentive to return for the next one and an additional \$25 after 90 days. Having staff return provides the organization with leadership and program continuity. It also reduces the time and cost of having to recruit, hire, and train new workers for each program cycle. At Westside YMCA, the return incentive resulted in an 85 percent staff retention rate over the last five years.

### *Capitalize on Technology*

The Internet has become a major force in recruiting staff. Posting jobs on a Web site provides organizations with access to an immense pool of potential applicants. Likewise, Web-based job postings that allow completion of applications online make it easier for candidates who are willing to relocate to apply for positions outside their immediate area.

**Use Online Job Matching:** Over the past ten years, Idealist.org has served as an online clearinghouse for job opportunities at nonprofit organizations,

particularly in the field of youth service. Organizations looking for workers post their positions on the Idealist.org Web site; individuals who access the site can search for desired job, internship, or volunteer opportunities in a variety of ways (e.g., by organization, geographic location, type of youth work desired) and can create profiles that generate automatic job announcements daily.

### *Create Specific Strategies for College-Age Workers*

***To attract the best and brightest applicants, you need to make a pitch to young people that combines an ability to solve big problems, gain skills and demonstrates how one can have a career doing this work.***

Russ Finkelstein, Action Without Borders/Idealist.org

A recent study of the San Francisco Beacon Initiative workforce found that while youth workers range in age from 19 to 63 years with an average age of 28, the most common age within the Beacon workforce is 23 years.<sup>12</sup> This is not surprising, since for many a job as a frontline youth worker may be one of their first. College campuses represent an under-utilized source of talented, quality program staff.

***Partner with Colleges and Universities:*** The YMCA of Greater Seattle has found that building strong relationships with local colleges and universities helps the program recruit frontline youth workers. At the University of Washington, for example the YMCA teen leadership director teaches seminars on positive youth development and practical youth development skills. As a part of the course, students work in YMCA programs to practice the very skills and techniques upon which the seminars focus. The YMCA feels that by providing intensive training experiences and manageable field work tasks, it is increasing students' interest in becoming full-time youth workers.

***Participate in Career and Graduate School Fairs:*** Idealist.org promotes the development of relationships between youth service agencies and local colleges and universities by promoting career and graduate school fairs. These forums enable college students to explore youth work as a possible career. They help universities find ways to involve their students in the life of the surrounding community through internships and other connections to agencies. In addition, youth service organizations gain an opportunity to increase public awareness of the work they are doing and to counsel and mentor young adults whose ambition it is to become youth workers.

***Begin with Young Youth Workers:*** Leadership & Renewal Outfitters offers a year-long Journey Fellowship program for young adults ages 18 to 22 years old who have expressed an interest in working with youth. The application asks for responses that will be used to determine whether interested individuals are *ready* to do the work, *willing* to commit the time, and *able* to work around family or job commitments in order to participate in the program.

The program consists of four weekend retreats that help participants explore who they are and what they want to be doing with their lives. In addition, they are mentored by experienced youth workers and work as interns to gain exposure to youth work. All costs for housing, meals, retreats, internships, and materials are paid by the Journey Fellowship program. Graduates help recruit new applicants from their high school or college campuses and become a strong voice promoting the youth work profession.

*Reach Out for Diversity*

***Keeping community roots intact and developing neighborhood-specific youth centers makes a difference in the response from the youth in that neighborhood.***

Virginia Witt, The San Francisco Beacon Initiative

Nationwide, demographics continue to change dramatically. As they do it becomes imperative for the staff of youth development agencies to reflect the ethnic makeup of their communities. This will clearly convey to youth and the agency's community a commitment to all youth. Furthermore, research has shown that linguistic and cultural competency is equal in importance to other skills required of youth workers.<sup>13</sup>

***Reflect the Culture of the Community:*** Recruiting high-quality staff who are fully reflective of the diversity of the youth being served can be an important part of program success. Public Allies considers young people from diverse backgrounds to be assets in their communities. The program is committed to developing indigenous leadership in the communities and neighborhoods it serves and providing qualified candidates with paid apprenticeships at community organizations. Through Public Allies, interested young adults apply to participate in a ten-month AmeriCorps experience. Public Allies screens applicants, choosing the best 25 to participate as “Allies” in the program, and then brings together the Allies and such sponsoring organizations as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati. The interview process allows the sponsoring organizations and the Allies to interview each other—a process designed to result in a “mutual choice.” The cost of compensating Allies is split by the sponsoring organization and AmeriCorps. This experience has led some Allies to become full-time youth workers and others to advocate for policy change in their communities.

***Network within the Community:*** In an effort to recruit qualified minority staff members, Methodist Children's Home uses bilingual newspapers and Web sites to advertise open positions. It also partners with community organizations like the Mexican American and Black Chambers of Commerce in sponsoring multicultural workshops.

**DETAILS** – The Methodist Children’s Home spends approximately \$2,000 to \$3,000 per year for advertising in bilingual newspapers and on Web sites. Costs for staff involvement with community groups is currently budgeted at \$8,000; however, this figure is dependent on the number of staff involved.

**Utilize Career Centers:** The Purdue Black Cultural Center works to inspire students to become youth workers. The Center recognizes that youth work necessitates gaining knowledge in a variety of areas (e.g., social work, human development, psychology, fund-raising) and that this need for interdisciplinary expertise can be stressful and lead to burnout. The organization encourages students interested in youth work careers to get a degree of interest to them and to get as much relevant volunteer experience as possible. The Center also provides students with supportive renewal activities that help them discover ways to avoid burnout as they move into a career in youth work.

### *Prepare Youth to be Youth Workers*

***Many young people need jobs, and many high school-aged girls like working with younger girls. Building on these two factors, interest in youth work can be developed at an early age and guide career decisions later.***

Patty Fernandez, Girls Inc. of the Central Coast/  
Action Council of Monterey County

Young people need guidance from significant adults in order to attain social, vocational, and civic competence, but they also need opportunities to practice learned skills and behaviors.<sup>14</sup> Many organizations are finding a wealth of skills and enthusiasm in high school-aged youth workers—more often than not the same youth who once participated in their programs.

**Engage Youth as Leaders:** Girls Inc. of the Central Coast believes that inviting school-aged girls to participate in a youth leadership program is the best recruitment strategy. All girls who become paid staff for Girls Inc. of the Central

Coast begin as participants in the high school leadership program. The organization asks the schools to refer promising candidates. The ten-month-long leadership program, led by program graduates in partnership with adult volunteers, teaches the girls leadership and public speaking skills. When they complete the program, they are eligible to apply for a position as a Youth Leader or a Teen Teaching Team member. Generally, 15 to 25 girls are hired each year as program facilitators. They are given ample opportunities to make decisions and participate in the planning and implementation of the agency's elementary, middle, and high school initiatives.

***Offer Internships:*** The YMCA of Greater Kansas City works with local high schools to provide opportunities for students to meet the internship requirements of the schools' work study program. Students are hired as part-time assistants for a year-long work study program. As supervised assistants, they help with program planning and implementation. Each quarter, students are reviewed by staff. As a result of this internship experience, many work study students discover first hand what a career in youth work would be like and decide to work for the YMCA of Greater Kansas City after graduating from high school.

## ***Retention***

Maintaining a stable workforce can only come about when organizations recruit the right people for the right reasons, are clear about their expectations, and train, support, and fairly compensate their staff. Frontline staff work long hours for little pay, and many will occasionally question the value of their work.<sup>15</sup> Because youth work is so often undervalued, respecting staff is just as important to the work as providing adequate compensation and benefits. It is equally essential to create supportive environments that include opportunities for staff to learn from each other in training, coaching, and mentoring activities. All these factors are key elements in staff retention.

### ***Select Staff Carefully***

***The staff, programs, and program environment need to be of the highest quality possible.***

Jody Voss, Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County  
& Lower Arkansas Valley

A common and inaccurate view is that anyone can do youth work, which often leads to hiring decisions being made simply on the need for “warm bodies” to fill positions. The reality is that youth workers need to possess a broad range of knowledge and skills and to be able to apply them effectively when working with young people.<sup>16</sup> Retaining effective staff must begin with a mutual understanding by the employer and the candidate of the skills and knowledge needed to perform the job. Retention begins with purposeful recruitment and selection.

***Begin with the Interview:*** Many job candidates present promising applications and references. However, Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley insists on seeing how well candidates can apply their skills to youth work. As a key part of the interview and screening process, final candidates are required to conduct a hands-on activity with program participants.

Staff then ask the youth what they thought of the individual candidates and have them describe how the activity was run. The comments are recorded and used to assist in making final employment decisions. This process gives the organization a clear idea of how potential staff will perform on the job; at the same time, it provides candidates with specific information about job expectations and skills needed.

### *Provide Adequate Compensation*

***There is a notion that people who do the work do it because they are passionate and committed; however, people need adequate compensation to provide for their families.***

Sharon Edwards, Cornerstones for Kids

Youth service workers have been characterized as “an extraordinarily dedicated workforce drawn to the sector by non-monetary rewards, but who are struggling to meet growing financial responsibilities with significantly lower salaries than their classmates entering other sectors.”<sup>17</sup> Effective strategies need to compensate for the combination of heavy workloads, irregular or insufficient hours, limited access to essential resources, and low pay.<sup>18</sup> It is not sufficient that youth workers like to do the work or are driven by a sense of mission. Just as many organizations advocate for the rights of the youth they serve, many are beginning to advocate as passionately for the rights of their frontline staff.

***Increase Full-time Positions:*** Many of the part-time staff at Camp Fire USA Alaska Council work second jobs within the school district or at local businesses. Realizing that wages and benefits are important to retaining qualified and competent staff, the council created a task force that has been looking for ways to make youth service work competitive with other businesses in the area. Sensing that one of the biggest reasons staff were leaving the agency was their ability to get more hours elsewhere, rather than higher wages, the organization

has gradually increased the number of full-time positions it supports, with benefits. The organization has also become more intentional about letting the community know about the value of the work being done with the youth in the area.

***Offer Competitive Pay:*** Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati (BBBSGC) is intent on maintaining pay scales that are above the bottom of the salary scale. Because the organization works with a number of volunteers and Public Allies interns, it is not faced with a huge hiring dilemma. However, for the staff it does employ it monitors salary trends of other organizations, such as the National Association of Social Workers, and sets wages accordingly. This results in BBBSGC paying higher wages than other BBBS agencies and private nonprofit organizations and keeps the organization competitive with public sector employers.

***Prioritize Benefits for Staff:*** Youth service organizations are typically small, and many employ staff on a part-time basis. As a result, youth workers often have limited access to affordable health and dental insurance as well as retirement or other benefits that are available to individuals working in other professions or larger companies. The Massachusetts School-Age Coalition (MSAC) has responded to this challenge by developing a plan that offers benefits to workers. Local youth service agencies that are members of MSAC are eligible to purchase insurance and other benefits from an agent who has contracted with the membership organization. The plan began with health benefits and has expanded to include retirement and other basic benefits. For tips on what to consider, see insert.

**DETAILS –** For small local organizations that want to offer benefits for their staff should follow these guidelines:

- Ensure that the affiliate is not responsible for member premiums or customer service.
- Locate a committed and creative insurance agent who can and wants to work with the youth service field and its unusual employment characteristics.
- Negotiate the minimum number of hours an employee may work and still be eligible for benefits (governed by law, an organization's personnel policies, and the insurance plan's regulations).

- Negotiate the best price and services.
- Make sure the agent can set up (at no cost) a Section 125 account for each employer.
- Explore using a portion of Medicaid funds in creative ways to support affordable health insurance both for small businesses/community-based organizations and their low-wage workers. Massachusetts, California, Florida, New York City, Oregon, and some counties in Michigan are among the states/municipalities/counties that participate. Each program is different.
- Reference staff benefits resources, such as:
  - Blaisdell Insurance  
George Blaisdell 1-800-882-8535  
[www.blaisdellinsurance.com](http://www.blaisdellinsurance.com)  
This is the agency MSAC works with. Blaisdell can service most states for health insurance and all states for dental insurance. He can also offer life, disability and retirement plans, set up Section 125 accounts, and connect clients to other supports to defray costs (like the Insurance Partnership).
  - The Insurance Partnership  
Josh Tobin 1-800-399-8285  
[www.4ip.org](http://www.4ip.org)  
The Insurance Partnership is the public/private agency that subsidizes health insurance for small employers and their employees in Massachusetts. It may be able to connect you to a similar program in your own state.

### *Offer Opportunities for Advancement*

***Getting youth workers started on a career ladder that includes on-going education, advancement opportunities, and professional recognition helps keep them focused on the bigger picture, which is the value of the work being done with youth.***

Kathleen Lodl, University of Nebraska – Lincoln  
Cooperative Extension

Youth workers who have opportunities for training, increased responsibility, and higher compensation are more likely to stay in their jobs longer.<sup>19</sup> More and more organizations are getting the message.

***Plan for Promotions:*** A key strategy at Camp Fire USA Alaska Council is promoting program aides to paid staff positions. Site directors talk with each aide about what it means to them to work at the agency. They ask, for example, whether aides see their position as a summer job or as the first step toward a possible career. Those who respond the latter are then mentored by the site director and receive specific training and planned exposure to a variety of youth

work experiences. Of the agency's current 100 frontline youth workers, 10 percent were promoted from a program aide position to program staff.

***Offer a Flexible Approach to Advancement:*** Given budget constraints, the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System has had difficulty finding qualified candidates who are willing to move to Idaho to fill positions in extension programs. As a result, the system has adopted a “grow our own” approach that allows youth workers who are interested in advancing to specialist and/or administrative roles in youth development programs to take up to three years to complete the required degree. As administrative staff get to know county youth workers, they begin to assess the young peoples' motivation and ability to become educators or specialists. Those youth workers are then sponsored in the “Learning to Lead” training program, where they acquire the skills needed for advancement. Several Idaho specialists have been hired to work at the state level as an outcome of this approach.

***Create Incentives and Support for Promotion:*** The University of Nebraska, Lincoln Extension, offers a summer internship program for college juniors and seniors interested in careers within the 4-H system. In this first step on a career ladder, the students begin work as extension assistants—entry-level positions in the system requiring a bachelor's degree—and are eligible for free tuition credit at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. They pay only \$1 per credit for up to 15 credits per year. This incentive is offered to encourage students to work towards a master's degree and eventually move into positions as 4-H educators. Typically, the assistants' work hours are kept flexible to accommodate their class schedules, and advisors work closely with them to design appropriate academic programs. In addition, the campus Extension Coordinator and a mentor in the county office provide the students with career counseling and help them adapt to the challenges of working with youth. Every effort is made to provide participants with the best educational and skill-building experiences by placing them in county offices that most closely match their interests.

## DETAILS –

The following is a summary of what it costs to implement the career ladder program at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln:

### Internships

\$4,800 per student, per summer (\$10/hour, no benefits or travel)

### For-Credit Courses

Resident tuition - \$199.50/credit hour

Up to 15 credits annually per employee - total cost up to \$3,000

### In-Depth Training – 3 to 5 days

Program Materials/Fees - \$200 per person

Instructor Fees - \$3,500 (up to 25 students in class)

Depending upon topic and instructor, these sessions could be taken for college credit

Cost of lost work time would vary by employee

### Monthly, Interactive Web-based programming

WebEx (or other educational system) - \$250/hour

Instructor Fees - \$100/hour

Cost of lost work time would vary by employee

*Create Supportive Environments & Climates that Foster Success*

***Most people want to be part of something worthwhile and will become more involved when they feel they are key players in that effort.***

Don Scott, Methodist Children's Home

Research on employee-organization relationships suggests that individuals will be more satisfied, will perform better, and will stay on the job longer when their personal attributes and the work environment are congruent.<sup>20</sup> Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment promotes a sense of connectedness among the staff that is critical to effective job performance and commitment to the organization.

***Be Flexible:*** Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati (BBBSGC) staff are able to work outside of the office by coordinating their desired schedules with a central administrator. Staff are accountable for quantifying their workload. This flexibility in scheduling is a way that BBBSGC attempts to create an environment

that minimizes the stress of the long and irregular hours that are often a hallmark of youth work.

***Balance Work and Life Responsibilities:*** Since irregular work schedules are a fact of life in youth programs, Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley also believes that flexibility is needed to ensure that individuals stay within a reasonable work week. Any extenuating circumstances that might affect job performance and program implementation (e.g., irregular schedules that occur due to training, floods, or community events) are taken into consideration when planning work schedules and responsibilities. The organization believes it is important to be aware of the demands on staff and provide support to avoid overextension and burn-out. For example, staff members are offered time off to attend their children's school functions, as well as flexible work schedules after the birth of a child and other pressing family circumstances. Since finding child care can sometimes be a problem, staff may bring their children to work, including babies, during non-program hours with the approval of their direct supervisor. Administration grants paid bonus days and often consolidates them around major holidays so that staff can enjoy holiday celebrations with their families.

### *Insist on Professional Development & Training*

***All staff are on a developmental path during their time with the agency. If we are able to invest heavily in their development, we enable them to perform more effectively with youth.***

Colleen Carroll, Camp Fire USA Alaska Council

There is a strong consensus that staff training and professional development are crucial to the success of out-of-school-time youth development programs.<sup>21</sup> Staff are more motivated to seek additional training if they are able to see some personal benefit as a result of that investment of time and effort—which again

points to the need for organizations to budget for the provision of professional development opportunities.<sup>22</sup>

***Require Training, Offer Incentives:*** The Community Agencies Corporation of New Jersey/Clinton Hill Weed and Seed Partnership (CAC of NJ/ Weed and Seed Partnership) requires its staff to attend 30 hours of in-house training, outside training, or college classes per year. All staff members prepare a professional development plan that details how they will implement the skills they have acquired and indicates any additional training they feel they need to assist them in their work with youth. Five to 10 percent of the budget of the organization is allocated to training and capacity-building; in addition, 20 percent of the cost of outside training is covered as an education incentive. CAC of NJ/ Weed and Seed Partnership also offers a graduated pay incentive each year for staff who have completed the training. This benefit, which represents three to five percent of the agency's budget, is contingent on staff members' number of years of service and performance evaluations. As staff see the increase in their paychecks for the training they have completed, they become more enthusiastic about their program service and more committed to staying with the organization.

***Place a Value on Education and Training:*** Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara offers training within the organization, but staff are also encouraged to seek outside education and training opportunities. Each staff member is invited to submit a request to those administering the agency's education/training budget, with approval made on a case-by-case basis. Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara also offers a pay rate increase based on completion of training or education (e.g., completion of college units, obtaining a college degree, CPR certification, completion of specific Girls Inc. program training).

***Offer Certification Opportunities:*** Westside YMCA offers courses, training, and certifications that staff are required to earn in order to work with youth. As part of a career development training program, part-time staff have the opportunity to

accumulate credits towards, for example, a YMCA Director Certification. Westside YMCA believes in taking an individualized approach to staff management. Its substantial investment in training and career development has helped several staff members transition from part-time to full-time positions.

***Link Concrete Competencies to Career Development Plans:*** Idaho 4-H is a part of the National 4-H Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Certificate Program (YDPA). Funded by the Department of Labor, YDPA is a structured apprenticeship program that includes precise definitions of required competencies and instruction and on-the-job training for youth practitioners who wish to develop those competencies. The fact that the DOL has created the certificate program and recognized youth development work for the first time has been an important stride for the recognition of youth development as a credible career. In the program, early career youth workers are paired with experienced 4-H educators who act as their mentors. Face-to-face meetings are conducted once a month, supplemented by frequent phone conversations. Participants also attend training sessions with other mentoring pairs. As a result of such networking and the self-confidence it generates, many youth workers have chosen to stay in Idaho.

**DETAILS** – The cost to send six individuals from Idaho to the Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship (YDPA) national training was \$5,000 and was paid for by a grant received by the University. Following the YDPA national training, the Idaho team held an in-state training for \$2,500. The cost of regular interaction between mentors and apprentices for the two years of the project was just under \$3,000. Thus, the total cost to initiate the YDPA program in Idaho was \$10,500. The organization now has a roster of trained mentors and can replicate the program for six individuals at a cost of \$5,000. *(All figures are approximate.)*

***Link to Community Resources:*** The YMCA of Greater Seattle believes that youth service organizations should network and collaborate with each other to provide training and specialized services. The YMCA, in collaboration with other youth serving agencies, offers training and seminars for youth workers and

teachers from other area organizations. These training events include service learning symposiums, forums for youth workers, and involvement in specialized collaborations around youth employment, tutoring, and working with girls. Participating staff are able to build a professional network and feel the broader, cumulative impact that their chosen profession is having on the community's young people.

***Apprentices working with mentors gain self-confidence and greater ability to do their jobs, particularly in the area of leadership and seeing the larger picture of youth development.***

Barbara Abo, Idaho YDPA Mentor

***Create Formal and Informal Mentoring Systems:*** The YMCA of Greater Kansas City attributes the improvement in its retention rates to an increase in training, resources, and staff support. New direct care staff attend initial orientation and training sessions. Participants are then offered a mentoring relationship with more experienced staff who provide them with additional support and deepen their learning and skill development. This facilitates a sense of connectedness among staff members. Guidelines specify that the mentoring pair spend between one and two hours per week for eleven weeks reviewing the employee handbook and YMCA policies and discussing general employee issues. After completing the training, the mentor continues to provide support and ongoing communication with the new staff member throughout the first year of employment. An increase in staff retention has been noted and attributed to the agency's supportive work environment.

The YMCA of Greater Kansas City also believes that *informal* mentoring among staff boosts retention rates. The agency makes a wide variety of program resources available in the main office so that staff have access to the tools they need to be effective and successful in their work. When staff members access the agency's resource room, they can share ideas, problem-solve, and network with others. Learning from each other in an informal, non-threatening setting facilitates the development of relationships among co-workers, a sense of

connectedness within the organization, and ultimately increases job satisfaction and staff retention.<sup>23</sup>

### *Value & Respect Youth Workers*

***By setting our own expectations high and valuing ourselves and what we do professionally we can raise the image of the youth service profession within our communities.***

Monica Spear, Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara

Youth workers' sense that their work is of little value and lacks respect has been shown to contribute to job dissatisfaction and high turnover.<sup>24</sup> It is important to recognize and express appreciation for youth workers' efforts as a way not only of improving morale but of enhancing the image of youth work among staff as well as within the community.

***Acknowledge Staff:*** Like many youth organizations, Camp Fire USA Alaska Council holds a recognition banquet annually to promote staff cohesiveness and acknowledge accomplishments. In the past, however, many new staff failed to attend this event because they had not yet connected with other staff, especially those outside their specific work area. A "first year connection" is now facilitated through the organization of several community events during the year. All staff—whether new or experienced—have the opportunity to serve on the planning committees and to attend the events with their families. Through participation at these functions, staff connect with others from outside of their specific work groups and increase their sense of belonging in the organization.

***Value Staff and the Work They Do:*** Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara strives to maintain a work environment that is supportive and challenging—one in which staff not only work well together, but also have fun together. Administrators believe it is essential to communicate to staff that they are making a difference in

the community. Events such as staff appreciation dinners and awards programs promote solid collaborative relationships and build a more cohesive work environment. In addition, social events for staff and their families are held several times throughout the year. The agency also believes it is important to communicate to the community the value of the work being done with youth and to show how it contributes to the future welfare of the Santa Barbara area and society in general.

***Engage Staff as Active Participants in Decision Making:*** At Methodist Children's Home in Waco, Texas, successful retention of high quality direct care staff is in part the result of the organization's commitment to emphasizing individual strengths while promoting teamwork and a stimulating work environment. The core model used at Methodist Children's Home emphasizes the strengths of both staff and youth. Young people are viewed as active participants and "partners" in planning, decision making, and program evaluation. As a result, the general mind-set within the facility is one of joint involvement and responsibility.

Partly as a result of this equitable approach, the organization has experienced an improved staff retention rate over the past four years, with many individuals planning to work at the organization until retirement. Likewise, youth display more enthusiasm for program participation, and problem behavior has decreased dramatically.

### *Ensure Opportunities for Networking*

***Instead of competing with each other, individuals from different organizations come together to share practices and challenges and to collaborate so they will not have to reinvent the wheel. It helps me and others to share techniques, strategies, standards, and competencies. It improves practice and promotes meaningful relationships.***

Vanessa Varko, Talking Circles Facilitator

Professional development is not an isolated activity but is nested within the larger workforce system.<sup>25</sup> Youth workers need opportunities to network both inside and outside the organizations where they are employed if they are to learn from one another and improve their practice skills.

***Foster Peer-to-Peer Learning:*** Ensuring that youth workers feel supported within the larger organization is a key piece in the YMCA of Greater Seattle retention strategy. At times direct care staff working within a branch feel isolated from others. It is crucial for them to stay in touch with their peers and to know that they have someone advocating for them on a broader level. The agency has developed a number of tools that help youth workers feel supported, including monthly electronic newsletters and e-mail connections among staff. Monthly training, strategizing sessions, and peer network meetings provide staff an opportunity to hear updates about what others are doing, discuss day-to-day youth work challenges, and get to know each other better. Inter-branch collaboration on programs such as YMCA's Earth Service Corps, Girls of Promise, and Youth and Government further facilitates the building of a sense of community within the organization.

***Network and Communicate within the Organization:*** Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley provides staff with training and peer networking opportunities, various forums for communication, and participation in the management of the organization's affairs. All staff are encouraged to comment, contribute, and participate in the direction of the corporation. Corporate meetings, which begin with a potluck meal, promote goodwill among the staff, encourage staff empowerment, and inform staff about corporate activities. Agenda items include an "Open Forum" that encourages staff members to share mission-specific ideas and developments; monthly in-service sessions that provide training on new or updated issues; a "Bonus Board" recognizing exceptional staff members; and "Share a Story"—an activity that

allows staff members to share an amusing or heartfelt moment with the youth the program serves. Program centers are required to include these same agenda items at their weekly staff meetings. In commenting on these activities, staff members appreciate the opportunity to get to know their co-workers better, perform more effectively as a result of receiving clear and complete communication, and feel empowered by having an opportunity to offer direction for the corporation.

***Network Across Organizations:*** Leadership & Renewal Outfitters offers a year-long Journey Fellowship program for experienced youth workers who are interested in renewing themselves personally and professionally. As with the Explorers program, twenty-five applicants (called “Trailblazers”) are chosen to participate each year. The focus of the retreats is on individual renewal and reflection, but being part of the group builds a networking and supportive community. The purpose of the Trailblazers program is to promote individual rejuvenation to help participants reconnect with their motivations for working in the youth service field and to create a framework for improving participants’ work performance while sustaining themselves in the process. Participants also learn how they can go back and help others reconnect and renew themselves.

## **Recommendations for Improving Recruitment and Retention**

The promising practice strategies presented in this report represent the efforts of selected organizations but address issues common to many local groups that provide community-based youth services. As such, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by any local organization attempting to respond to the challenges of effectively recruiting and retaining qualified and competent youth workers.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Local Recruitment Recommendations:***

- Identify the demographics: Who is currently doing youth work in your community? What activities are these individuals interested in? What were their reasons for pursuing these positions? What competencies would other potential employees need to have if they were to apply for or accept a youth development job? Identify key factors significant to your workforce and use the information to inform best practices.
- Create innovative organizational recruitment structures that include referral and hiring incentives; internships and work study programs; and optimal use of technology to attract qualified job applicants.
- Reach out to a diverse population of potential frontline youth workers. Network with individuals and specific organizations that reflect the culture of the community being served. Consider second-career and early-retirement professionals as a likely pool of candidates for youth work.
- Market youth work as a significant profession and respectable career choice. See to it that your organization builds a reputation in the community as a high-quality place to work. Clearly communicate the value of the services being offered to the youth in your area.
- Regularly evaluate and modify your organization's recruitment strategies.

***Local Retention Recommendations:***

- Establish clearly defined competencies for staff members and recruit accordingly.
- Offer your staff ongoing professional development opportunities. Make sure that they are easily accessible. Include systems of support such as mentoring and coaching.
- Provide adequate compensation and a clear path for career advancement within the organization.
- Whenever possible, accommodate staff members' needs for sufficient preparation, reasonable workloads, flexible hours, adequate benefits, and a voice in the organization's decision-making process.
- Demonstrate the value of frontline youth workers' efforts by conducting formal recognition activities.
- Regularly evaluate and modify your organization's retention efforts.

## Conclusion

Though the strategies presented here were collected from staff at local organizations, they point to a number of tasks that need to be accomplished nationwide. **On the national level**, there is a **need for better data** on who is in the youth service workforce; why individuals enter; why they leave; and what they are looking for as they mature in their careers. There is also a need for intentional strategies aimed at **increasing public awareness** of the complexity and importance of youth work. As a relatively new field, youth development needs to identify successful **strategies in related disciplines** and disseminate them to administrators and frontline workers. Youth service professionals at the national level must also become more **attuned to local needs** and gather and provide the research, guidelines, information, training, and technical assistance required in the field. They must pursue a **policy agenda** that puts young people and those who work with them at the forefront. But the issues on the table do not just concern local or national youth service organizations. They concern the entire nation and its need to commit more resources to the future of youth. Only through a concerted effort on everyone's part can ALL young people in America receive the support and opportunities they need to achieve a fulfilling and productive adulthood.

## **Appendix A: The National Collaboration for Youth**

The National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) is a coalition of the National Human Services Assembly member organizations that have a significant interest in youth. For the last 30 years, NCY has provided a united voice to its members in advocating to help young people in America reach their full potential. Many NCY member organizations have been providing high-quality out-of-school-time programming to youth for more than 100 years.

Members of NCY include more than 50 national, nonprofit youth organizations.

Collectively, the member organizations

- serve more than 40 million young people
- employ over 100,000 paid staff
- utilize more than 6 million volunteers and
- maintain a physical presence in virtually every community throughout America.

## Appendix B: Interviewees

Judy Bennett, Deputy Executive Director – *Community Agencies Corporation of New Jersey/Clinton Hill Weed and Seed Partnership*

Ron Brock, Associate Director – *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati*

Chris Butler, Executive Director – *Westside YMCA*

Colleen Carroll, Director of School-Age Programs – *Camp Fire USA Alaska Council*

Juanita Crider, Program Advisor – *Purdue Black Cultural Center*

Patty Fernandez, Program Director – *Girls Inc. of the Central Coast/Action Council of Monterey County*

Russ Finkelstein, Associate Director – *Action Without Borders/Idealist.org*

Jude Goldman, Executive Director – *Massachusetts School-Age Coalition*

Kathleen Lodl, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development – *University of Nebraska, Lincoln*

Arlinda Nauman, Director – *University of Idaho Extension/4-H*

Jessica Paul, Senior Youth Development Director – *YMCA of Greater Seattle*

Kristina Prather, Program Director – *YMCA of Greater Kansas City*

Paul Schmitz, President/CEO – *Public Allies*

Don Scott, Administrator – *Methodist Children's Home*

Monica Spear, Executive Director – *Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara*

Jody Voss, President/CEO – *Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley*

Janet Wakefield, Director – *Leadership & Renewal Outfitters*

Myranda Warden, Assistant Youth Director – *Abiding Faith Lighthouse*

Virginia Witt, Executive Director – *San Francisco Beacon Initiative*

## **Appendix C: Advisory Group**

### **Shelly Cryer**

Consultant to American Humanics

### **Ellen Gannett**

Co-Director

National Institute on Out-of-School Time

### **Priscilla Little**

Associate Director and Project Manager

Harvard Family Research Project

### **Nicole Yohalem**

Program Director

Forum for Youth Investment

## Appendix D: Organization Descriptions

**Abiding Faith Lighthouse** serves 25 inner city youth in the Indianapolis area with a staff that consists of one paid part-time employee and three volunteers. Three of the staff are white (non-Hispanic/Latino) and one is African American. Despite the fact that no insurance benefits are offered, staff are motivated to continue working there by their belief in the mission of the organization and take time regularly to support and encourage each other.

**Action Without Borders/Idealist.org** provides job and resource information from almost 50,000 organizations from 170 countries. More than 300,000 individuals worldwide have accessed information about jobs, internships, and volunteer opportunities from this site. Thus far the group has convened 90 nonprofit career fairs on college and university campuses across the country. It does not advertise, but rather depends on word-of-mouth referrals from individual outreach at career fairs and from the various organizations with which it works (e.g., AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps).

**Black Cultural Center at Purdue University** coordinates mentoring services and activities for college students of color. The five full-time and four part-time workers employed by the Center assist student mentors with youth work-related academic and career planning. Ninety-seven percent of the workers are African American, one percent are white (non-Hispanic/Latino), one percent are Hispanic/Latino, and one percent are Asian American. Full-time staff are eligible to receive health insurance, sick leave, and vacation time.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Cincinnati** provides mentoring for 1,000 to 1,500 youth. The organization employs seven full-time and four part-time frontline youth workers and utilizes the services of many volunteers and Public Allies interns. While many of the volunteers and interns are African-American and Hispanic, 100 percent of the direct care staff are white (non-Hispanic/Latino). Full-time staff receive health and dental insurance and a fully paid pension plan. Both full- and part-time staff are eligible for sick leave and vacation time. Salaries are competitive with those offered by other organizations in the area.

**Boys & Girls Club/Girls Inc. of Pueblo County & Lower Arkansas Valley** serves nearly 4,000 youth at two rural and four urban centers in Southeastern Colorado. Over half of the staff are Latino/Latina, and approximately 30 percent of staff come from backgrounds that presented challenges similar to those faced by the youth they serve. Frontline staff are required to have a four-year college degree and three years of experience with at-risk youth; however, experience is considered in lieu of a degree in some cases. The agency's affiliation with both Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Girls Incorporated allows them to utilize national job posting services and notices about potential employees when recruiting. Though its pay scale cannot compete with other youth organizations

and school districts in the area, it do provide staff with comprehensive health, dental, vision, and long-term disability insurance.

**Camp Fire USA Alaska Council** serves 1,200 children through its School-age Childcare Programs and 200 through Drop-in Center Programs in the Fairbanks and Anchorage areas. The council employs 13 full-time and more than 150 part-time staff. The agency offers its staff medical, dental, vision, and retirement benefits as well as a flexible spending account. It also provides 75 percent tuition reimbursement for outside conferences in addition to many in-house training opportunities.

**Community Agencies Corporation of New Jersey/Clinton Hill Weed and Seed Partnership** serves 1,500 youth through a variety of recreation and prevention programs. It employs 20 full-time and 10 part-time contractual staff. Eighty percent of the staff are African American and 20 percent are Hispanic/Latino. The agency offers work studies for teens and internships for college students. A bachelor's degree is preferred for full-time staff, and salaries are scaled in accordance with work experience and education.

**Girls Inc. of the Central Coast** serves 300 girls in the Monterey County, California, area. It employs 23 part-time direct care staff; the ethnicity of the staff is 95 percent Hispanic/Latino and 5 percent Pacific Islander. Staff who work more than 20 hours per week are eligible for health, dental, sick time, and vacation benefits. Salaries for high school-age leaders are comparable to other "first job" wages available to high school students in the area. Pending evaluation, youth workers are eligible for a raise after six months. Many of the teens who work as youth leaders go on to college at one of the University of California or California State University campuses and often major in a youth development-related field.

**Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara** provides onsite and offsite programs for 2,600 girls ages 4 to 18 years old. It employs 16 full-time and 66 part-time direct care staff, all of whom must have some education in early childhood development and some prior experience working with youth. The staff's ethnic background is as follows: 67 percent white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 21 percent Hispanic/Latino, 5 percent Asian American, 4 percent African American, and 3 percent bi-racial or other. Salaries and benefits packages are competitive with organizations in the area. The agency believes that its reputation for having a supportive work environment and placing a high value on the quality of its staff has helped it maintain a stable workforce in spite of some economic challenges.

**Journey Fellowship** has served 147 youth workers: 76 were prospective youth workers ages 18 to 22 years old; 36 were early-career youth workers with less than 5 years experience; and 34 were tenured youth workers with 10 to 30 years of experience. Since 2003, 26.5 percent of the Journey Fellows have been African American, 0.5 percent Asian American, 2 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 71 percent white. Fifty-four different youth-serving organizations have been

represented in the fellowship, and an additional 57 youth-serving organizations have had Journey interns serving their organizations.

**Massachusetts School-Age Coalition (MSAC)** is the Commonwealth's statewide organization dedicated to systematically enhancing the workforce and promoting the professional development of school-age workers. Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, MSAC is one of 35 state affiliates with the National AfterSchool Association (NAA, formerly NSACA). MSAC is a grassroots organization governed by a dedicated board of providers and allies. MSAC's more than 250 members represent all types of school-age and after-school programs: extended day, community-based, faith-based, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Methodist Children's Home**, which is a private nonprofit organization in Waco, Texas, operates two facilities for youth: a 180-bed residential facility for boys and girls with behavioral and emotional disorders and a 50-bed ranch outside of Waco for boys with more severe conduct disorders. One hundred seventy-five full-time and 11 part-time direct care staff implement the agency's programs. Forty-eight percent of the staff are African American, 47 percent are white (non-Hispanic/Latino), and 5 percent are Hispanic/Latino. Direct care staff are required to have at least a high school education and some prior experience working with at-risk youth. While salaries are comparable with those offered by other youth organizations, they are lower than most other types of jobs available in the area. However, full-time staff do receive health, dental, sick leave, and vacation benefits.

**San Francisco Beacon Initiative** offers after-school programs that provide training in education, health, arts and recreation, leadership, and career development for 7,500 to 8,000 youth in eight neighborhood-based centers throughout the Bay area. Sixteen percent of staff are African American, 35 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 9 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 31 percent white (non-Hispanic).

**University of Idaho Cooperative Extension** serves nearly 48,000 youth throughout the state in predominantly rural areas. Extension programs employ 48 full-time and 20 part-time frontline youth workers. The ethnic makeup of this frontline staff is 86 percent white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 8 percent Hispanic/Latino, 1 percent Asian America, and less than 1 percent African American. Programs offer flexible work schedules and scholarships to help youth workers take advantage of professional development opportunities. Salaries are similar to those of local school teachers. Benefits are available to full-time staff through the University.

**University of Nebraska-Lincoln Nebraska Extension 4-H** is a statewide system that annually reaches 118,000 youth ages 9 to 19 years old in 93 counties in Nebraska. Ninety-nine percent of the 77 full-time and 16 part-time staff are white (non-Hispanic/Latino) and one percent is Hispanic/Latino. A

bachelor's degree is required for an entry-level position as a 4-H assistant. Previous experience in youth work is preferred but not required. Opportunities vary greatly between rural and urban areas, but in general, higher salaries and more regular work hours are available in many other sectors of the job market. The organization believes, however, that the ongoing educational and career advancement opportunities it offers staff help offset this challenge.

**YMCA of Greater Kansas City** serves 3,500 children ages 6 weeks to 12 years old in early learning centers, before and after school, half-day kindergarten extension, and summer camp programs. The programs employ 279 full-time and 125 part-time staffers in order to maintain state licensing adult-to-child ratios (at least 1:15). Staff ethnicity is as follows: 81 percent white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 15 percent African American, 2 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 2 percent Asian-American. Flexible work hours are offered as much as possible to accommodate students' class schedules and other staff needs. Full-time staff are offered health, dental, sick leave, and vacation benefits as well as flexible spending accounts. All staff are provided the training and equipment needed to promote a professional image of youth work.

**YMCA of Greater Seattle** serves 17,000 youth 12 to 18 years of age in 15 branches, 3 camps and dozens of program sites across the county in which Seattle, Washington, is located. The programs employ 45 full-time and 20 part-time staff. The ethnic composition of full-time staff is as follows: 22 percent African American, 64 percent white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 4 percent Hispanic/Latino, 4 percent Asian, 2 percent Pacific Islander, and 4 percent bi-racial or multi-racial. Staff who work more than 30 hours per week are eligible for health, dental, and retirement benefits, as well as paid time off. Salary and benefits are comparable to those offered by other youth organizations in the Seattle area.

**Westside YMCA** serves 3,000 to 4,000 youth in the Fort Worth, Texas, metropolitan area. It employs two full-time and 25 to 30 part-time staff. The ethnicity of the staff breaks down as follows: 32 percent African American, 28 percent white (non-Hispanic/Latino), 2 percent Asian American, 6 percent bi-racial or multi-racial, and 2 percent other. The agency offers flexible hours, free individual branch membership, health benefits, paid time off, reduced childcare rates, infant and toddler program, and \$250 college stipends.

## **Appendix E: Methodology**

### **Survey**

As a first step in identifying “promising practice” strategies in the recruitment and retention of frontline youth workers, members of the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) were asked to complete a web-based survey. Participants responded to questions relating to challenges their organizations have experienced in recruiting and retaining qualified and competent youth workers, practices their organizations have in place to meet those challenges, and methods of determining whether their strategies have been successful.

### **Telephone Interviews and Case Studies**

After results from the web-based survey were analyzed, project staff interviewed representatives from various organizations with a view toward developing a report on recruiting and retaining qualified and competent youth workers. Interviewees were asked to describe attributes of typical frontline youth workers at their organizations, to discuss how they determine salaries and how those salaries compare with those in other types of jobs in their communities, and to indicate other ways they compensate frontline youth workers. They were then asked to provide more information about the recruitment and retention strategies they referred to on the web-based survey. Lastly, they suggested recommendations for other organizations trying to recruit and retain high-quality frontline youth workers, proposed some ways we might collectively achieve these goals, and pointed out how their strategies for recruitment and retention might address some of the challenges identified by research in the youth work field.

### **Symposium**

Individuals who participated in the telephone interviews were invited to attend a one-day symposium in Washington, DC, to further explore issues related to

effective youth worker recruitment and retention. A series of small group activities and large group discussions during the symposium increased information about best practice strategies and led to the proposed recommendations.

### **Additional Interviews and Advisory Group**

Following the symposium, an advisory group was formed to provide expertise and input into the final production of this publication. Each advisory group member provided background on workforce issues in either youth work or the broader nonprofit sector and participated—through conference calls and e-mail—in reviewing and commenting on the publication’s structure and content.

## References

---

- <sup>1</sup> Light, P. C. 2003. *The health of the human services workforce*. Center for Public Service, The Brookings Institution and Wagner School of Public Service, New York University. [http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi/cps\\_final.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi/cps_final.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> Bouffard, S., and Little, P.M. 2002. Promoting quality through professional development: A framework for evaluation. *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*, 8. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Yohalem, N. 2003. Adults who make a difference. In *Community youth development: Programs, policies, and practices*, F. A. Villarruel, D. F. Perkins, L. M. Borden, and J. G. Keith, eds., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 358-372.
- Bednar, S. G. 2003. Elements of satisfying organizational climates in child welfare agencies. *Families in Society*, 84: 7-12.
- <sup>4</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2003. *The unsolved challenge of system reform: The condition of the frontline human services workforce*. [http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi/report\\_rev.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi/report_rev.pdf).
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. and Yohalem, Adults who make a difference.
- Stone, B., Garza, P., and Borden, L. 2004. *Attracting, developing & sustaining youth workers for the next generation: A collaborative strategy for creating a national system*. Report from the Wingspread Conference. [http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/library/wingspread\\_report.pdf](http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/library/wingspread_report.pdf).
- <sup>6</sup> Bednar, Elements of satisfying organizational climates; Light, The health of the human services workforce; Walker, J. A. 2003. The essential youth worker. In *Community youth development*, 373-393; Yohalem, Adults who make a difference; and Stone, et al., Attracting, developing & sustaining youth workers.
- <sup>7</sup> Bednar, Elements of satisfying organizational climates and Walker, Essential youth worker.
- <sup>8</sup> Walker, Essential youth worker.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Light, Health of the human services workforce.
- <sup>11</sup> Hogg, M. A., and Terry, D. J. 2001. Social identity theory and organizational processes. In *Social Identity Processes in Organizational Contexts*, M. A. Hogg and D. J. Terry, eds., Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press, 1-12.
- <sup>12</sup> Beacon Workforce Study. 2005. <http://www.sfbeacon.org/resources/tools.html>.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ferber, T., Pittman, K., and Marshall, T. 2002. *State Youth Policy: Helping All Youth to Grow Up Fully Prepared and Fully Engaged*. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment.
- <sup>15</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, Unsolved challenge.
- <sup>16</sup> Stone, et al., Attracting, developing & sustaining youth workers.

- 
- <sup>17</sup> Ballard, A. 2005. *Understanding the next generation of nonprofit employees: The impact of educational debt*. Study conducted for The Building Movement Project. Berkeley, CA: Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley.
- <sup>18</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, Unsolved challenge.
- <sup>19</sup> Bouffard and Little, Promoting quality.
- <sup>20</sup> Kristof, A. L. 1996. Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Personnel Psychology*, 49: 1-49.
- <sup>21</sup> Little, P. M. 2004. A recipe for quality out-of-school time programs. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 10(1): 18-19. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue25/expert3.html>.
- <sup>22</sup> Light, Health of the human services workforce.
- <sup>23</sup> Walker, Essential youth worker and Hartje, J. A., Evans, W. P., and Killian, E. 2006. Youth worker characteristics and self-reported competency as predictors of intent to continue working with youth (manuscript under review).
- <sup>24</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, Unsolved challenge.
- <sup>25</sup> Weiss, H. B. 2006. From the director's desk. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 11(4): 1. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue32/index.html>.
- <sup>26</sup> These recommendations are derived from the literature on this subject; the *Capturing Promising Practices in Recruitment and Retention Symposium* held November 2005 in Washington, DC; and supplementary interviews conducted for this report. In addition, the writers and Advisory Group members drew on their professional expertise in helping to develop recommended strategies.